

GRAND JUNCTION CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP SUMMARY **April 1, 2024**

Meeting Convened: 5:32 p.m. The meeting was held in person at the Fire Department Training Room, 625 Ute Avenue, and live streamed via GoToWebinar.

City Councilmembers Present: Councilmembers Scott Beilfuss, Cody Kennedy, Jason Nguyen, Randall Reitz, Dennis Simpson, Mayor Pro Tem Abe Herman, and Mayor Anna Stout.

Staff present: City Manager Greg Caton, City Attorney John Shaver, Assistant to the City Manager Johnny McFarland, Utilities Director Randi Kim, Parks and Recreation Director Ken Sherbenou, Engineering and Transportation Director Trent Prall, Housing Manager Ashley Chambers, Police Chief Matt Smith, City Clerk Amy Phillips, and Deputy City Clerks Krystle Koehler and Selestina Sandoval.

1. Discussion Topics

a. Whitman Design Update

Parks and Recreation Director Ken Sherbenou along with James Palmer and Greg White representing DTJ Design introduced this item. They reported that Whitman Park renovation is a project in the Parks, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Master Plan. A Request for Proposals (RFP) was issued following 2024 budget approval that included \$150,000 for the design of Whitman Park. After evaluation of proposals and interviews, the design team led by DTJ was chosen as the vendor given their extensive experience in similar projects, their ability to reimagine community spaces, their expertise in placemaking, and their comprehensive team that includes many locals in a wide variety of trades. On April 1 and 2 the first phase of public engagement was to include a Council workshop, focus groups, and a community forum. A survey has been launched and will be promoted at the meetings to achieve a strong response rate. To date the survey has received 400 responses. One of the focus groups includes a meeting with the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB). This first phase will focus on engaging the community to understand what is most needed regarding park use. This will be done through image voting to help outline priorities, the testing of previous input and ideas from the PROS plan, including previous concept designs, and the presentation of examples from communities across Colorado and beyond. This input will then be analyzed, and it will drive the resultant concepts for a renovated Whitman Park.

The next phase of in-person public engagement is slated for May 13 and 14, where the community will have an opportunity to provide input on the concepts, each of which will include rough order of magnitude cost estimates. A preferred concept will emerge that will then be further defined to a schematic level of design including detailed cost estimates for consideration for construction funding. PRAB, following several meetings with the designers, is expected to make a recommendation at the end of this process to the City Council regarding this project.

Other methods of public engagement throughout the entire process are planned to include collecting input through surveys (not planned to be statistically valid) and on EngageGJ.org. A recording of the presentation of each phase in this planning process will be posted on EngageGJ.org, so community members can then provide additional feedback. This data, as well as previous input, is planned to weigh heavily into the resultant schematic design. Attendees at the listening sessions usually include

strong representation from community members with strong opinions on the future of Whitman Park. DTJ and their public engagement experts, CivicBrand, recommended additional public feedback methods such as a survey and interactive online engagement to help achieve more representative community opinion.

The project team concluded the presentation by sharing their experience in various scales of projects and emphasized their role as trusted guides to assist the community. They highlighted the importance of understanding the community's goals and context, particularly in relation to the downtown area and historical significance.

b. Sustainability and Adaptation Plan Update

Community Development Director Tamra Allen and Anna Laybourn sustainability consultant explained that the Sustainability and Adaptation Plan for the City of Grand Junction will provide long-range goals to guide the community, partners, and the City towards more sustainable practices and policies. This plan complements the One Grand Junction Comprehensive Plan to address social, environmental, and economic implications and opportunities for sustainability and adaptation in the region to ensure a healthy future for all community members. They noted that Saff have been working with the consultants from Design Workshop and Spirit Environmental since May 2023. In November 2023, a Current Conditions and Community Engagement Summary was presented to City Council.

Since then, significant progress has been made toward developing the plan. In November, an open house was held with 45 attendees. After the open house, staff and the consultants worked on developing the first iteration of draft strategies. In late January, City staff, technical experts, and the Community Steering Committee members met to discuss the goals and strategies within each of the five focus areas. Since those work sessions, the draft goals and strategies have been amended by consultants, staff, and the Community Steering Committee.

In order to get more public input, staff have also taken the plan on the road. As of March 27, staff have met with 14 groups/organizations and presented information about the plan to more than 230 community members. In each presentation, staff provided a call to action to encourage community members to offer suggested strategies or goal priorities on the EngageGJ.org platform. Comments received at in-person presentations and online have also been incorporated into the draft strategies.

The five Focus Areas and their respective goals are as follows:

1. Built Environment

- Goal 1: Balance Transportation Mode Share for Local Trips
- Goal 2: Encourage Innovative Site Design to Foster the Coexistence of Urban and Natural Environments
- Goal 3: Improve Community Access to Food

2. Climate Resilience

- Goal 4: Build Redundancy to Mitigate and Adapt to Natural and Social Hazards
- Goal 5: Maintain Current Air Quality Standards

3. Energy Stewardship

- Goal 6: Encourage Energy Efficiency in Buildings
- Goal 7: Support Carbon Reducing Energy Initiatives

4. Waste Management

- Goal 8: Increase Recycling Rates within the City
- Goal 9: Reduce Waste to Landfill via a Circular Economy

5. Water Conservation

- Goal 10: Increase Water Conservation Education and Awareness
- Goal 11: Reduce Water Consumption from Landscape and Irrigation

Not under any of the five Focus Areas was:

- Goal 12: Successfully Implement the Sustainability and Adaptation Plan

There are between 5 and 11 strategies per goal. An implementation matrix is being developed with specific actions related to prioritized strategies to help staff and partners with short-term implementation. The public comment period on the draft plan is April 19 through May 17. Staff will return to the Council workshop with a 90 percent draft in mid-May before the City Council is asked to consider adoption in mid-summer 2024.

Discussion covered various aspects of the Sustainability and Adaptation Plan, including the language used in the document, the organization of strategies, and considerations for public engagement and behavioral change. There were suggestions to improve accessibility and readability of the plan, as well as discussions on the alignment of strategies with values and priorities. Specific topics addressed included energy efficiency, water conservation, urban agriculture, air quality, and transportation. The importance of considering budget constraints and practical impacts in decision-making processes was also highlighted. Overall, the discussion reflected a thorough review of the plan's goals and strategies.

c. Grand Junction Housing Authority Impact Fee Exemption

This item discussed the Grand Junction Housing Authority's exemption from payment of impact fees. Under Colorado law (C.R.S. 29-4-227(1)), housing authorities are exempt from paying development-related fees to local governments, and the City has not backfilled these fees with other City funding. Staff recommended continuing the practice of exempting those payments from housing authorities and not backfilling the fees.

Impact fee exemptions and impact fee waivers were the subjects of inquiry at the January 30, 2024, special meeting, during which funding for the Grand Junction Housing Authority (GJHA) "The Current" project was approved. It was represented at that meeting that the City is exempting \$757,184 in fees for the project.

Other low- and moderate-income housing projects are not exempt from fee payment by local code or state law. Typically, low-income housing projects have approached the City to pay all or a portion of the development fees that are due. If requests were approved, funds have been allocated from the General Fund or other sources like the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). The City has historically taken the position that the fees are not exempt and need to be paid in full; however, the Code provides the City Council with the discretion to pay for some, none, or all the impact fees imposed

on low or moderate-income housing development to promote housing affordability as enabled by CRS.290290194.5(c)(5).

Discussion revolved around the legal framework provided by Colorado state law, which exempts housing authorities from certain fees. Councilmembers express varying opinions on whether the waived fees should be backfilled, with considerations for past practices, potential impacts on future fee structures, and the distinction between exemptions mandated by law and discretionary policy decisions. City Manager Caton emphasized the difference between exemption and waiver, suggesting that while exemption may not necessitate backfilling, waiver decisions might warrant consideration of backfilling the waived fees.

Discussion led to a motion from Councilmember Simpson, seconded by Councilmember Kennedy to backfill all non-enterprise fees and to not backfill enterprise fees. The motion failed.

After further discussion, Council consensus was to refer the issue to a future workshop for a broader conversation about policy. This approach would allow for a more comprehensive discussion and consideration of the specific project incentives.

d. City Land Inventory

Ms. Allen explained, Housing Strategy 6 encourages the use of underutilized City-owned property for affordable and mixed-income housing. Staff have created a summary and inventory of City land, which could be potential opportunities for future affordable and mixed-income housing.

The City's adopted Housing Strategy includes Strategy 6: Allocate City-owned land (and/or strategically acquire vacant or underutilized properties) for affordable and mixed-income housing. The strategy further states, "Property acquisition costs, especially in developed areas of the City, are a major component of the cost of developing affordable housing." The City and other public agencies, such as Mesa County and the state, own properties that could reduce costs and facilitate affordable housing development. While much of this property is either already utilized for public facilities or is inappropriate for residential development, there may be opportunities to leverage additional affordable and mixed-income housing through better utilization of publicly owned property. Included in the strategy was the recommended action to inventory existing public land, including City-owned land, the County, State, District 51, and others, and to evaluate the feasibility of residential development.

With the passage of referred ballot question 2B in November 2023, the City can now lease City-owned property held for governmental purposes for 99 years. An inventory of City property has been created and was attached in the agenda documentation. Staff also provided a summary of the City-owned properties that appear to have development potential for residential use.

Staff recommended that the properties indicated as Good or Significant development potential be further explored for future development.

1. Fire Station 5: 2155 Broadway
- 2: Fire Station 7:2351 H Road
- 3: Sawmill-Los Colonias Site

A revised park plan for Matchett Park was also indicated as a potential location for

an affordable or mixed-income housing project.

Discussion ensued regarding the possibility of leasing City-owned land for affordable housing purposes and considered various approaches, including public-private partnerships and requests for proposals (RFPs). Additionally, there was a mention of the need for further discussion on land banking and strategic land acquisition for housing development. The Council expressed interest in exploring these options further.

Consensus among Councilmembers was that affordable housing is a priority and that expediting the development process is desirable. However, there was also a recognition of the need for competitiveness and ensuring that the City's vision for each property is realized. Some key points and considerations based on discussion:

1. **Affordable Housing Priority:** Councilmembers agree that affordable housing development should be prioritized, and there is a sense of urgency to move forward with these projects.
2. **Competitiveness vs. Expediency:** While speed is important, there was also a desire to ensure that a competitive process is maintained to get the best outcomes for the City. There may be a balance needed between expediting the process and maintaining competitiveness.
3. **Property-Specific Considerations:** Each property has its own potential and challenges. Councilmembers acknowledge that some properties may require more control and vision from the City, while others may be more straightforward and can be developed more quickly.
4. **Staff Recommendations:** Councilmembers expressed trust in staff to provide recommendations tailored to each property's characteristics and potential. Staff can conduct initial fact-finding to gauge interest from developers and bring forward proposals for consideration.
5. **Individual Property Consideration:** While the properties are being discussed collectively, each will be considered individually as they progress through the development process. This allows for property-specific decisions and considerations.
6. **Feedback and Collaboration:** Councilmembers emphasized the importance of ongoing feedback and collaboration throughout the process. They want to be kept informed and involved in decision-making regarding each property.

e. **Alley Improvement Districts**

Engineering and Transportation Director Trent Prall reported that Alley Improvement Districts are a partnership between a block of neighbors and the City to pave alleys throughout the City. The process of bringing a district to fruition is very cumbersome, with ordinances to form the district, award construction contracts, assess the costs to adjacent property owners, and then collect assessments over the next ten years.

Alley Improvement Districts are a partnership between a block of neighbors and the City to pave alleys throughout the City. The Alley Improvement Districts are formed when 51 percent of the

property owners representing 51 percent of the frontage along an alley petition the City to form an Improvement District. The Council forms a District that legally ties all the benefiting properties. The City constructs the alley and then assesses a portion of the costs for the properties based on abutting footage. Before 2008, there was a flat rate abutting property owners paid based on whether the property was single-family, multifamily, or non-residential. In 2008, the assessable amount was set to a percentage of construction and remains the same today: Single-family residential properties were responsible for approximately 15 percent of the project cost, multifamily residential properties paid 25 percent, while non-residential (commercial/industrial/non-profit) properties paid 50 percent.

Before 2010, the City had funded an Alley Improvement District program, which improved about half of the alleys in the City from 1988-2010, as shown on a map (130 out of 280). The City would historically fund four alleys per year. Over that period, the City invested \$4.9 million and received \$1.36 million in assessments (City share 72 percent). The Alley Improvement Districts benefited 2,021 properties and improved a total of 66,722 LF (12.6 miles).

Since the re-implementation of the program in 2017, the City has completed an additional six alleys, with the most recent alleys improved being adjacent to Grand Junction High School and another in the Riverside Neighborhood. There are about 145 alleys totaling 81,500 LF (15.5 miles). Current costs to improve a standard east west alley in the City of Grand Junction are between \$180,000 and \$200,000, based on a 450-foot alley at \$400 and \$450 per linear foot. Based on that, there remains between \$32.5 million and \$36.5 million to pave the balance of the alleys in the City.

After a review of the program staff asked Council to consider whether to:

1. Maintain status quo with existing cost shares,
2. Increase/decrease cost shares,
3. Eliminate the partnership and instead just budget funds with the 0.75 cent sales tax capital improvement fund, or
4. Eliminate the partnership for residential but keep the partnership for non-residential uses.

People's Ordinance No. 33 authorizes the City Council to create improvement districts and levy assessments when requested by most of the owners of the property to be assessed. Council may also establish assessment rates by resolution.

If the decision is made to eliminate the program, staff would look to the Council on how to prioritize which alleys would be improved first.

Also, for Council consideration is whether the alleys could be self-performed. The material for an alley would equate to approximately 160 cubic yards of concrete and 300 tons of road base at an expense of \$40,000 per alley.

After lengthy discussion ensued, Council directed staff to place this item on a Council workshop in June to discuss staff recommendations for future improvements.

f. **Air Alliance**

This item was to discuss the City Council's role and relationship with the Grand Junction Regional Air Service Alliance (GJRASA) pertaining to the sharing of GJRASA-related information from the City Council board representative to the City Council.

Conversation revolved around the need for reporting and accountability measures regarding the allocation of public funds to the Air Service Alliance. Some key points discussed included:

1. **Desire for Reporting:** Councilmembers expressed a desire for regular reports detailing expenditures and commitments made by the Air Service Alliance. The aim is to provide transparency without disclosing confidential details of negotiations with airlines.
2. **Complexity of Negotiations:** There was recognition of the complexity involved in negotiating deals with airlines while maintaining transparency. Councilmembers emphasized the need to balance transparency with the confidentiality necessary for effective negotiations.
3. **Importance of Accountability:** Councilmembers underscored the importance of accountability in the use of public funds, particularly those approved by voters for specific purposes such as enhancing air service to the community.
4. **Scope of Council's Authority:** There was discussion about the Council's authority to review and potentially alter the allocation of funds to the Air Service Alliance. While the Council cannot directly negotiate deals with airlines, it has oversight over the use of public funds.
5. **Direction for Negotiation:** Councilmembers provided direction to negotiate a reporting structure that would provide insight into the impact of allocated funds without compromising confidentiality. The goal is to ensure accountability and stewardship of taxpayer money.
6. **Timing and Committee Assignments:** There was consideration of timing regarding committee assignments and potential changes in representation on the Air Service Alliance board. This could impact negotiations and decision-making processes moving forward.

2. **City Council Communication**

1. **Committee Assignments:** There was mention of committee assignments and potential changes in representation on various boards and committees.
2. A brief discussion on potential changes to election policies, including the consideration of ranked-choice voting. These topics may be addressed in future meetings based on further developments.

3. **Adjournment**

There being no further business, the Workshop adjourned at 9:00 p.m.